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DOMENICI VOTES TO PROHIBIT IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW OSHA WORKPLACE ERGONOMIC REGULATIONS

Senate Passes Amendment to FY2001 Labor-HHS Appropriations Bill

WASHINGTON -- The Senate today passed (57-41) an amendment cosponsored by U.S. Senator Pete Domenici to impose a one-year prohibition on implementation of new and controversial Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations on ergonomics.

Domenici, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, indicated that the amendment would stop OSHA from using any of its funding to promulgate the new regulations. The measure, sponsored by Senator Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., was added to the FY2001 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (Labor-HHS) Appropriations Bill.

"Every single business in New Mexico will be affected by these new regulations, which makes it even more urgent that OSHA thoroughly consider the ramifications of its proposals. Such important regulations must be developed and implemented with the utmost care," Domenici said. "This amendment basically sends OSHA a message that we want this job done right. The impact and costs to New Mexico could be significant. I continue to be concerned that if these rules are imposed, many small businesses in New Mexico will struggle to afford compliance."

Since OSHA began taking action to implement the rules last fall, Domenici has been consistently leery of the regulations, which he considered rushed and developed without due consideration to their impact on small businesses. In addition he has contended that the regulations should not be imposed until an on-going study on musculoskeletal disorders by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is completed in early 2001.

OSHA's proposed new ergonomic regulations address repetitive stress injuries such as strains and sprains, carpal tunnel syndrome, lower back pain and other maladies resulting from repetitive motion and overexertion. The contentious regulations were unveiled last November.

In May 1999, Domenici also cosponsored a bill (S.1070) to force OSHA to wait until the ongoing NAS study is concluded before moving forward on the regulations. The NAS study was mandated by Congress and the administration in 1998 and is intended to determine whether OSHA has sufficient evidence to proceed with an ergonomics regulation.